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Teaching and Learning Center (TLC)

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Crazy Times in Columbia, Outrage in Rock Hill. And Charleston. And Spartanburg. And Clemson. And Myrtle Beach...

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The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

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Negotiating
Skills 4/8

Harassment and
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Training 4/10

Deferred
Compensation
Retirement
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Winthrop University

Crazy Times in Columbia, Outrage in Rock Hill. And Charleston. And Spartanburg. And Clemson. And Myrtle Beach . . .

I am outraged, and I hope you are too.

When I choose my textbooks and teach my classes, I make my own decisions and choices, guided by goals set by me and my department and the university. I hold dear the academic freedom that lets me make those informed, educated decisions.

My academic freedom, and yours, is under fire. I am outraged, and I hope my words will spread that outrage.

You have probably heard about the South Carolina legislature's actions in response to the common books for freshmen at College of Charleston and USC-Upstate. Some legislators were upset that these two schools chose books with which they disagreed; specifically, both books revolved around gay and lesbian issues. The USC-Upstate common book is *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio*, a compilation of readings

from a radio show. The College of Charleston book in question is *Fun Home*, an autobiographical graphic novel about a lesbian and her upbringing with her conservative, closeted gay father.

In late February, the House Ways and Means Committee voted to cut the budget for USC-Upstate by \$17,000, and the budget for College of Charleston by \$52,000, which is the amount each school paid for their common books. On Monday of this week, Democratic legislators offered amendments that would restore the funding, amendments that were defeated by the Republican majority. The full House is now taking up the votes, with the cuts likely to pass, pursuant approval the Senate and by Governor Haley.

I am outraged.

The main sponsor of these actions, Representative Garry Smith, R-Greenville, says

these cuts are not about academic freedom.

Representative Smith can say that all he wants. The truth is, this is PRECISELY about academic freedom. Faculty at colleges and universities have the academic freedom to choose the textbooks they want to have their students read, as well as the way they deem proper to teach them.

It's only about common books, some might say. Why the outrage?

There is more, of course. Another legislator is questioning the choice of a textbook for a social work class at USC-Columbia. The issue here is that the textbook is critical of President Reagan's welfare policies in the 1980s. No news yet of any legislative action, but just imagine the wise folks in Columbia poking their head into every one of our syllabi.

Things can't get any crazier, right? Wrong

"This is serious stuff, folks, and these are perilous times in our state. Academic freedom lies at the heart of our mission as teachers, scholars, and researchers, and academic freedom is under attack. I am standing up, in outrage, in response to these actions. I owe it to my students. I owe it to my colleagues. I owe it to Winthrop University. I owe it to the concept of higher education in America."



Continued from page 1

again.

Representative Mac Toole, R-Lexington, introduced this week an amendment to the budget that would withhold one million dollars in funding to any state school that did not teach the Constitution and Bill of Rights for a year. Not that crazy, you say? Rep. Toole has more: he wants to withhold that million if schools do not ban the use of "pornographic content" in classes. Still not crazy enough for you? He also would withhold that million if the school does not ban the use of live nude models in class.

This would all be funny if it were not so close to home and if it were not so serious. These fine legislators are again making South Carolina a national laughingstock, but we are too close to the issue to laugh. We should be, we must be, outraged.

The Honorable Rep. Toole said he did not need to define "pornographic content," that everyone knows what that means. The problem is, it all depends on what Mr. Toole thinks is pornographic.

I am an English professor. Will he cut off Winthrop's funding because I teach Walt Whitman's *Leaves of*

Grass or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, two books that other misguided legislators have deemed pornographic? Will he object to students in an art history class gazing at Michelangelo's David in all his full-frontal glory? Or Titian nudes? Or Picasso?

That textbook for the class on human sexuality has pictures! Graphic pictures, of male and female body parts! And it shows how they work and what happens when they do! And it has—gasp—words! Pornographic words!

This just in: since I wrote those last words of outrage two days ago, Rep. Toole, R-Crazy, removed the part of his amendment that deals with porn and naked people. Some sanity reigns in Columbia, apparently. But I fear such proposals are just the tip of the iceberg, and that more is coming.

At Winthrop's Faculty Conference on March 7, we passed the following resolution:

"The Winthrop University Faculty Conference unequivocally defends academic freedom as essential to higher education. This freedom, and the occasional controversies it can generate, is fundamental

to the pursuit of truth and knowledge in all disciplines. Legislative efforts attempting to influence or limit curricular decisions at any institution are a threat to academic freedom at all academic institutions."

Every Faculty Senate or other faculty governing body at every South Carolina public college and university is in the process of drafting and passing similar resolutions, to be forwarded to the legislature as a body.

This is serious stuff, folks, and these are perilous times in our state. Academic freedom lies at the heart of our mission as teachers, scholars, and researchers, and academic freedom is under attack. I am standing up, in outrage, in response to these actions. I owe it to my students. I owe it to my colleagues. I owe it to Winthrop University. I owe it to the concept of higher education in America.

I am outraged. I hope you are outraged too.



XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: kosterj@winthrop.edu The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>



A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Join XXITE 2.0 or
Register for a TLC
Session

At

www.winthrop.edu/tlc

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

Thought For the Week

"Suppose you were an idiot.
And suppose you were a
member of Congress. But I
repeat myself."
--Mark Twain